

PURPLE SANDPIPER

(*Calidris marina*)

What is a PURPLE SANDPIPER?

The purple sandpiper is a slaty-brown wading bird, with a hint of purple in its plumage. When feeding in its favourite habitat of dark, wet, seaweed-covered rocks, it is very well camouflaged and easily overlooked. Purple sandpipers feed on molluscs and amphipods.

About 21,000 purple sandpipers spend the winter in Britain with the majority on the flat rocky coasts of Shetland, Orkney, east Scotland and north-east England. They arrive in October and November. Purple sandpipers often roost on man-made structures e.g. groynes and piers.

Where are they found in the UK?

The purple sandpiper is a winter and passage visitor to Britain. It is extremely rare for purple sandpipers to breed in Britain. Breeding is restricted to open ground on hillsides, mountains and arctic tundra; they breed only in Scotland, at one or two sites which are protected.

For most of Britain, the purple sandpiper is a regular passage migrant and winter visitor from October to May, chiefly on the rocky coasts of eastern and northern Britain.

Why is the purple sandpiper of CONSERVATION INTEREST?

The purple sandpiper winters along the coast of the Durham area in nationally important numbers.

THE PURPLE SANDPIPER IN THE DURHAM AREA

How HEALTHY is the local population?

Incomplete WeBS coverage in recent winters provided a five-year wintering peak of 160 for the Durham coast. Data is lacking for the north end of the Plan area.

How much do we know about the purple sandpiper in the DURHAM AREA?

In the Durham area, the purple sandpiper is a fairly



STATUS: The purple sandpiper is protected under Schedule 1 of the Wildlife and Countryside Act 1981.

It is protected under the EC Birds Directive and Appendix II of the Bonn Convention (which protects migratory species). The purple sandpiper is also listed on Appendix II of the Bern Convention as a protected species whose habitat is in particular need of conservation. In the UK, the purple sandpiper is a Species of Conservation Concern, as a rare and localised breeder. In a European context, purple sandpipers are regarded as having Favourable Conservation Status.

Other action plans and statements covering issues relevant to the purple sandpiper:-

➤ ROCK PIPIT*

➤ ROCKY SHORES***

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common winter visitor where it can be seen along the coasts on rocky shores. Much of the information about purple sandpipers in the Durham area comes from surveys co-ordinated by the BTO and undertaken by members of Durham Bird Club and Teesmouth Bird Club. The surveys are part of the national Wetland Bird Survey (WeBS). Ringing shows that the coast of the Durham area acts as a cold weather refuge for birds that initially attempt wintering in Scandinavia.

WHERE does the purple sandpiper occur in the Durham area?

It most frequently occurs at rocky outcrops along the coastline of South Tyneside, at Whitburn Steel in Sunderland and to the south of Hendon and in the Easington district at Blackhall. Its main foraging sites in the Durham area are in the Ryhope/Seaham area of Sunderland and at Pincushion/Salterfen/Featherbed Rocks. There is a major roost site at Seaham Docks with other sites at Sunderland Docks and South Tyne Pier. There are also prime sites south of the Durham region at Hartlepool and Teesmouth.

Purple sandpipers are at RISK from:

DISTURBANCE - at their feeding and roosting sites due to unrestricted beach access.

CHANGES IN WATER QUALITY - changes in sewage treatment systems may lead to a reduction in prey numbers.

UNSUSTAINABLE HARVESTING OF SHELLFISH - this may reduce the amount of prey available.

COASTAL POLLUTION - this may reduce the amount of food available.

Purple sandpipers BENEFIT from:

REDUCED LEVELS OF DISTURBANCE AT ROOST AND FORAGING SITES - man-made structures such as piers, groynes and harbour walls are particularly important for undisturbed sheltered roosts along the coast of the DBAP area.

FURTHER RESEARCH - into the effects of changes in

water quality following sewage treatment improvement works.

Important HABITATS for purple sandpipers are:

ROCKY SHORES

MAN MADE COASTAL HABITATS E.G. PIERS

TARGETS

1 Maintain current numbers of wintering purple sandpipers along the Durham coast. (ONGOING)

2 Monitor the numbers of purple sandpipers wintering along the coast of the Durham area. (ONGOING)

3 Monitor the effects of change in physical environmental factors. (ONGOING)

4 Reduce levels of disturbance at principal roost and foraging areas through education and interpretation. (2005)

5 Increase local interest in wintering birds on beaches. (ONGOING)

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ACTION PLAN

ACTION	DATE	Possible PARTNERS	Meets TARGET No.
POLICY AND LEGISLATION			
1. Liaise with local authorities to protect sensitive areas from development.	2001	EDC, STMBC, GC, DBAP, DCC, SCC	1
2. Incorporate the protection of wintering shorebirds into ICZM.	2001	EN, DBAP	1
SPECIES MANAGEMENT AND PROTECTION			
3. Implement measures to minimise disturbance at the roost sites and foraging sites.	ONGOING	EDC, STMBC	1
RESEARCH AND MONITORING			
4. Monitor and document the status of the purple sandpiper through the work of DBC and WeBS.	ONGOING	DBC, BTO, TBC	2
5. Monitor the impact of the cessation of colliery waste despoilment on purple sandpipers and their habitat.	ONGOING	DBC, BTO, RSPB	3
6. Continue studies of ringed populations to assess survival rates and lifespans of individuals.	ONGOING	TRG, DBC, TBC, BTO, Durham University	1, 2
7. Submit all records to the Local Record Centre.	ONGOING	All Partners, Local Communities	2
ADVISORY			
8. Ensure that all the different organisations involved in purple sandpipers studies in the Durham area work together.	ONGOING	All Partners	1, 2, 3, 4, 5
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY			
9. Encourage local birdwatchers to send in records.	ONGOING	DBC	1, 5
10. Conduct winter guided walks for bird watching along the coast.	ONGOING	DBC, EDC, STMBC, NT, SCC	5
11. Raise awareness of the problem of marine pollution and the threats it poses to shorebirds.	ONGOING	DBAP, EN, NT, RSPB	1, 5

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ACTION PLAN

ACTION	DATE	Possible PARTNERS	Meets TARGET No.
COMMUNICATIONS AND PUBLICITY continued			
12. Prepare publicity information as part of integrated coastal/marine interpretation package.	2002	DBAP, CA, NT, LAs	5